

Save Weyerhaeuser Campus nomination

Washington Trust for Historic Preservation's 'Most Endangered List'

(Note: This document reflects the circumstances in place at the time of the nomination deadline in January.)

What is the historic significance of this property?

The Weyerhaeuser corporate campus was commissioned in the 1960s by George Weyerhaeuser, great-grandson of the company's founder. Today, the wooded campus includes the headquarters building, a technology center, a manmade lake, large meadows, the west shoreline of North Lake, miles of wooded recreational trails, the Rhododendron Species Botanical Garden and the Pacific Bonsai Museum.

To design the campus, George Weyerhaeuser chose architect Charles Bassett, a principal in the San Francisco office of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill (SOM) and landscape architect Peter Walker, founding partner of Sasaki Walker & Associates (SWA), also based in San Francisco.

The headquarters building and the landscape were designed as a unit, with the goal of merging the five-story Modernist building (a "skyscraper on its side," in Bassett's words) seamlessly into the landscape. The building spans a shallow valley and acts as a dam on East Hylebos Creek, creating a 10-acre lake. The campus was notable for merging contemporary corporate design with environmental sensitivity, and the building interior boasted one of the first open-office layouts in the U.S. The technology center, also designed by SOM, was completed in 1978.

In 1974, George Weyerhaeuser invited the rhododendron garden to relocate to a 24-acre site on the campus. The woodland garden displays 700 of the more than 1,000 species rhododendrons found around the world. As rhododendron habitat is destroyed in many parts of the world, conservation has come to be of primary importance to the group. The bonsai collection, started by Weyerhaeuser in 1989 in conjunction with the state's centennial celebration, was donated by the company to a nonprofit in 2013.

The design of the Weyerhaeuser headquarters building won the National Honor Award from the American Institute of Architects in 1972 (a year after its completion) and the American Institute of Architects Twenty-five Year Award in 2001. Peter Walker, considered a pioneer of landscape architecture, has won many awards during his long career and co-designed the National September 11 Memorial in New York City.

Historic preservationists, including the Washington State Department of Archeology and Historic Preservation, and the Washington Trust for Historic Preservation, believe the building and its intentionally designed campus are likely eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. At the recommendation of these preservation organizations, the city of Federal Way is requiring the developer to evaluate the site for its historical and architectural significance and obtain an official determination of eligibility from the state.

What is the current significance of this property in the community?

The new owner, Industrial Realty Group, is in the process of subdividing the property for development, which will forever change the cohesive and open-space character of the 430-acre campus as designed by the original architects.

Although the new owners have pledged not to change the exterior of the acclaimed and historic headquarters building, there are no guarantees; the interior of the building is proposed for parceling to accommodate multiple tenants if necessary. The character of the campus is being threatened by plans to build more than 1 million square feet of warehouse space on more than 100 acres of the campus. Developers of the first project — a 314,000-square-foot seafood-processing plant and freezer warehouse — have abandoned their project. However, the master use permit for a building of similar size on the 19-acre parcel southeast of the HQ building remains vested and continues through the city's technical review process. Three warehouses are proposed on northern portions of the campus. Clear-cutting second-growth forest for new development will have visual and environmental impacts. In addition, the futures of the rhododendron garden and bonsai collection are uncertain because they sit on leased land.

Community efforts to stop the proposed industrial/warehouse development are being led by Save Weyerhaeuser Campus, a nonprofit group of concerned people from Federal Way and surrounding areas. A small group of nearby residents began working with the city and The Land for Public Trust in 2015 in an effort to preserve as a conservation reserve some 44 acres of the campus that make up the west shoreline of North Lake.

Their efforts have been adopted by Save Weyerhaeuser Campus and expanded to include seeking protection for the rhododendron and bonsai collections. In January 2017, Federal Way Mayor Jim Ferrell appointed his senior policy adviser as a liaison to help the group in obtaining acquisition funds for this conservancy. Other officials assisting the group include King County Councilmember Peter von Reichbauer and newly elected 30th District Rep. Mike Pellicciotti.

Why is this property in need of advocacy from the Washington Trust?

The former Weyerhaeuser campus, with its ivy-covered headquarters building and huge American flag, is highly visible from Interstate 5. Built nearly 20 years before Federal Way incorporated, it one of the city's most recognizable features and brings a sense of pride to many in the community. Every spring when the lupines bloom in the meadow north of Weyerhaeuser Lake, people come from all over to enjoy and photograph the colorful landscape. The campus is also important for environmental and recreational reasons. North Lake is the source of East Hylebos Creek, the main branch of an important salmon-bearing system that flows under the headquarters building and eventually empties into Puget Sound in Tacoma. The campus is one of the last forested green spaces in Federal Way and serves as a much-needed recreational and open-space corridor on the city's east side. For 45 years, the public has been welcome to use the estimated 7 miles of nature trails that Weyerhaeuser created when it developed its corporate campus; it's not unusual to find cars parked on the shoulders of the road adjoining the main meadows, their owners off jogging, walking dogs or just appreciating nature. For 40 years, Rainier Audubon and Tahoma Audubon have done an annual count of birds on the campus. Their results show a healthy, important habitat that will be damaged by clear-cutting to build warehouses.

This is a place that matters to the community, as evidenced by more than 300 comments against the processing/freezer warehouse project during the public comment period. More than 1,300 people have signed an online petition to save the campus. A Facebook group dedicated to the effort has some 500

members. And a newly elected state representative who knocked on hundreds of doors during his campaign reports that the Weyerhaeuser campus is a major concern for residents.

What are your long-term goals for this property and how do you feel the Washington Trust can help accomplish these goals?

Community members have proposed some creative ideas for preservation of the property: Convincing the University of Washington to bring its global health initiative to the site; building a veterans hospital and health care system to meet the needs of those who have served our country; or finding someone with deep pockets and love of the environment to purchase the campus and preserve it as a regional nature park/education center. Save Weyerhaeuser Campus has a broad vision that allows a variety of responsible development to be considered: Retain the open spaces of the campus, preserve its natural features and maintain its unique character, as required by the 1994 annexation agreement signed by the city and Weyerhaeuser. We are working with the city, the Land for Public Trust and IRG to try to save the west shoreline of North Lake as a conservancy area. Any development on the rest of the campus should not be industrial or warehouse-oriented. Structures should be of outstanding architectural design and blend into the campus environment — using as a guide the Technology Center, designed by SOM and screened from view with timber. Semi-truck use should be minimal, to limit noise and air pollution and prevent gridlock on already congested routes in and around the city.

We believe the Most Endangered program will shine a brighter light on the changes being proposed on the former Weyerhaeuser campus. We aim to draw significant attention from the media and key players who can help us convince the broader community, and ultimately the owners, that any new development on the campus should respect its historic character and blend with the unique landscape. We hope to attract a prominent member of the community who can add a powerful voice to the collective voice of the community — making our message of saving the campus for future generations not just heard, but turning it into reality.

